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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Well, it's been one of those weeks - quiet. The most interesting, and "hopping" action all week was on Wall St.! And those hops were spiraled downward. So much for my retirement investments! And, a few more of those "also-rans" for presidential hopefuls bit the campaign dust. Not surprising, so far. Even Mother Nature has been relatively quiet here in the Northeast. Cold, but no snow. Something to be thankful, I'm sure!

Both my wife and I are now certified, after completing our firearms safety course. We completed the final stage this past week with our learning about a variety of gun laws, and more. Now we're both trying to figure out how some of the more "stupid" gun laws are on the books! Some of the various aspects that were pointed out to us were really eye-opening, and actually stupid. I won't repeat them here; you'll just have to take our word on it! I even went to the range this week to do some shooting, albeit via a pellet gun. I didn't get to spend too much time due to my not having much power (CO2 cartridges), but I managed to get in enough practice to whet my appetite. Meanwhile, we are getting all of our necessary paperwork together to submit to our local PD to acquire our necessary permits. So, it will be awhile but hopefully all will go the way that we want.

So, while I'm thinking of bullseyes, I'll leave you to another issue.

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. I wish I had something spiritually enlightening or earthshaking to tell you about this week, but I don't. It's just been one of those weeks where nothing seems new or noteworthy, y'know what I mean?

The politicians are still talkin' smack, the economy is about to take a

bad turn, and the employment numbers aren't anything to be happy about. Yessiree Billy-Ray Jim-Bob, it looks like we're in for a little bit of a storm here... and I'm putting it mildly.

It kind of reminds me of... what?... Fifteen years or so ago?... when Atari was starting to show that they were more in the business of making money for Jack and giving the boys a job to keep them out of trouble as opposed to continuing to make computers that were affordable, innovative and easy to use.

For quite a while, they blamed the economy. "Well," they said, "we're a relatively small company. You can't expect us not to scale back when the economy's bad, can you?" and my personal favorite, "We're not down-sizing. The new term is 'right-sizing'."

Either way, a lot of people moved away from Atari computers, and away from the clubs and groups that supported them. I can remember when a couple of dozen people would show up at local Users' Group meetings. At the end, there were just three of us hard-core users who met in the den of one of the members once a month.

Even after Atari stopped making computers, and it was clear that they weren't going to set the gaming market on fire with the Jaguar, the three of us got together every month to shoot the bull... I'd bring my Stacy laptop, the guy whose house we were at would pull some 8-bit software out of the archive and go to town on one of his upgraded machines, and the other guy would have a couple of European ST magazines or a piece of software he'd just bought mail order or something, and we'd sit and have coffee and just shoot the bull. Sometimes, we'd talk about computing, but other times we'd talk politics, sometimes about our families or about what was happening in the next town over or whatever, but it wasn't really important what we talked about. We were friends because we had something in common. When one of us had a problem, there was a good chance that one of the others had a line on how to fix it.

Well, all things must end, and one of the three stopped showing up, and the guy whose house we met at got transferred from here in Connecticut to Ohio, so that was that. We still get together, the two of us, when he comes back here for holidays and vacations.

We got together over the holidays last month, as a matter of fact. We and our wives went out and had dinner, then came back here and talked about the good old days for a while. Man, I miss that.

Well, it doesn't look like those days are coming back anytime soon, so I'll have to be content with the memories. Okay, enough of that. Let's get to the news, hints, tips and info from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

Didier Mˆ'quignon writes to tell us:

"After 18 months of experience on Coldfire M5484LITE board where the TOS,
MyAES and MINT works under a Radeon PCI board, the idea is to use the latest Freescale M54455EVB board for accelerate the Coldfire migration:

http://tinyurl.com/2utyvm [URL modified by Editor]

It’s a complete board with a mini-ATX box who use u-boot for start Linux under the latest Feescale Coldfire:

* Freescale MCF54455 ColdFire microprocessor
* DDR2 SDRAM (256 MByte)
* Two NOR flash memory devices (16 MByte, 512 KByte)
* Serial flash
* U-Boot bootloader
* MRAM (512 KByte, accessible through FPGA Flexbus interface)
* Four PCI slots
* Two-port Ethernet interface 40-pin
* ATA connector
* Audio interface (I2S mode of SSI module connected to audio codec)
* Multiple USB interface options
    - FS/LS Host via on-chip transceiver with host support (Type A receptacle)
    - HS/FS/LS dual-role via external ULPI PHY (Mini-AB receptacle)
* Two RS232 serial ports (RS232 transceivers on UART0 & UART1)
* One USB serial port (UART0 serial converted to USB converted on UART0)
* Built-in P&E Micro USB Multilink debug interface
* Standard 26-pin BDM header
* Serial interface header for access to timers, interrupts, DSPI, I2C, and more
* Clock generation logic adjustable via I2C
* LEDs and 7-segment display programmable via CPLD and FPGA

It’s possible without lot of work (one or two months) to rebuild a Coldfire TOS 4.04 (like here http://ctpci.atari.org) for get an Atari clone (a base of work) booting under a Radeon PCI board.
The coldfire MCF54455 V4m at 266 MHz is faster than the MCF5484, like the v4e has an MMU but _NO_ FPU (look at Kronos capture here http://ctpci.atari.org).
But there are some advantages like USB host, ATA 6 Ultra DMA Interface, I2S sound port.
There are also 2 Ethernet ports, 2 serials port and a 3rd serial port in 5V who can use the original Eiffel interface with just a cable or a why not TT keyboard.

In a 1st time use host USB is another story, but Eiffel exists for mouse and keyboard.

Actually the TOS 4.04 for the Coldfire not need external driver for get drives on CompactFlash, so it’s easy to get ATA working with the same method.

The SCSIDRV protocol is also implemented under TOS but not tested because a CompactFlash cannot replace a DVD drive with Extendos.
There are also an lwIP Ethernet stack under TOS who works fine (TOS GlueSTick, TFTP / HTTP / FTP servers, and also a VNC server unfinished), where I need just to update the Fast Ethernet Controller file for this new Coldfire.

If some peoples are interested by this project or has some questions, please contact me:

a * n * i * p * l * a * y * AT * w * a * n * a * d * o * o * POINT * f *

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Sorry I hate spam!!

It’s a great complete development board !

PS. thanks also to Olivier Landemarre for his Coldfire MyAes port."

Jo Even Skarstein tells Didier:

"I have followed this project with great interest, and it would be really fun to get involved in it. Unfortunately I don’t have much time for this hobby anymore - work, kids and renovating a house occupies all my time. Hopefully I’ll have some time to contribute later."

’Calimero’ opines:

"[The] price of M54455EVB board is 850$? Right?
It’s a little bit expensive?!

I see that there some PowerPC boards for Amiga OS 4.0 but they are also expensive, more that 400euro...

Anyway, if it will be full TOS/GEM compatible solution than it is worth every cent!"

Jean-Franˆ§ois Lemaire tells Calimero:

"Actually, it’s not a board, it’s a complete computer. And compared with the other ColdFire solutions (which are only devel boards) it’s pretty cheap -- and faster. If I was not waiting for the postman to bring me a Falcon CT63, I would buy one."

Derryck Croker posts this about the translation of Phoenix 5.2:

"I’m just finishing off the translation of the remaining Alerts in the designer and manager.rsc files for the above, but there are a few that I can’t make sense of. Particularly "Bericht" and "Report", as I have the same translation for both!

Anyway, if anyone can help, please?

<snip>

Datenbanken oder Tabellen von|Bericht- oder Report-Definition|und ausgewˆ/hlten Datensˆ/tzen stimmen|nicht ˆ…berein!

Report ’%s’|nicht gefunden!

Bericht ’%s’|nicht gefunden!

Eingangsrechnung ’%s’|nicht gefunden!

Ausgangsrechnung ’%s’|nicht gefunden!

Verknˆ…fungsobjekte ’Verknˆ…pfen von’|oder ’Verknˆ…pfen nach’ nicht

gefunden!|Untermaske wird nicht erzeugt!

</snip> "

Karsten Lˆ…dersen tells Derryck:

"You have the same translation for both because the sense of both is the same (or almost the same). There are these two words because there are two different functions, that needed a name. "Report" is the old function, more like an ASCII-file. "Bericht" appeared in the latest versions of Phoenix and have more graphic possibilities. For the translation of Phoenix to english you have to find a new word for the second type of Report.

Derryck relies:

"Ouch, that’s what I thought, and so did Peter West.

I found the printed manual that Dennis Vermeire sent me 5 years ago when we first started this project. I can’t remember why it didn’t get finished, may be there was a loss of contact with the author. Anyway, it’s described on page 25 as a report that is suitable for output to screen or printer, so something like Rich Report or something similar might work."

Hallvard Tangaraas asks for opinions on boot selectors:

"What do you recommend to use as a boot selector?

So far I’ve used Superboot, but it has a few shortcomings:
- can’t handle CPX modules properly (disabling them means renaming them with an X at the end!!!)
-cumbersome to set up/configure
Other than that it’s surprisingly versatile if you look past the ugly, old-fashioned text-only user interface.

Looking back I had a lot of hope in McBoot by John McLoud. I even got free registration keys from his website several years ago (2001?). Alas the website (http://www.the-mclouds.de/software.html) isn’t up any longer.

McBoot seems interesting. Alas there’s no English language RSC file available -actually there’s no RSC file at all, or I’d translate it myself.

So what else is there which is freely available, or available at all?"

On the subject of translating an app when there’s no RSC file, Derryck Croker tells Hallvard:

"Hex editor, or use eed from www.rgfsoft.com which DDP Translations use(d) for these compiled text-type programs. It extracts the ASCII which you translate, then it replaces the original in the binary with your version. Of course, that cannot be longer, but there’s not usually any problem with German-English."

Henk Robbers adds:

"Visit my website: topic Multiple booting
I'll provide a taylor-made version if you like the idea."

Well folks, that's it for this week. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Endless Ocean Ships For Wii!
Twisted Metal: Head On!
Virtual Games A Hit Among Seniors!
And more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

Endless Ocean Ships For Nintendo Wii

Nintendo invites you to dive into a new genre of video games. Launching this week for Wii, Endless Ocean lets users discover a vast undersea adventure at their own pace. It's like a virtual scuba vacation in the tropics that includes interaction with hundreds of different animal species, relaxing swims through brilliant coral reefs and exploratory dives on wrecks of ships and warplanes. With the game's intuitive controls and beautiful underwater visuals, every member of the family will want a chance to dive in.

Endless Ocean contains everything you might find on a real ocean scuba dive. Divers can find dozens of different treasures, from gold bullion to ancient artifacts. The marine biology encyclopedia lets divers record the different animals they spot and learn facts about each one. Divers might encounter more than 230 types of creatures, including penguins, tropical fish, sharks, whales and trainable dolphins. The stunning visuals will make you feel like your TV has transformed into an undersea portal. Navigation is simple too: To swim, just point the Wii Remote and press the B Button; to examine an object, just point at it and press the A Button.

"Endless Ocean is a siren song for adventurers, family gamers and the just plain curious," says Cammie Dunaway, Nintendo of America's executive vice president of sales & marketing. "Kids will love meeting and cataloguing

all the sea life they meet, while their parents can lose themselves in a seemingly unlimited underwater landscape."

When connected to Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection, Nintendo's wireless gaming service, two divers who have exchanged Friend Codes can dive and explore their environment together. Divers can listen to diving music by international best-selling artist Hayley Westenra or play audio files from an SD card.

Endless Ocean is one of two games Nintendo is releasing this week that demonstrates the way the company continues to appeal to both core and casual gamers. While Endless Ocean for Wii invents a new casual-game genre, Advance Wars: Days of Ruin for Nintendo DS is a turn-based strategy game that appeals to both existing fans of the series and newcomers to the strategy genre.

Remember that Wii features parental controls that let adults manage the content their children can access. For more information about this and other Wii features, visit http://Wii.com. For more information about Endless Ocean, visit http://EndlessOcean.com.

Twisted Metal: Head On: Extra Twisted Edition Hands-On

This Twisted collector's edition will surely appeal to your rotten sweet tooth.

"In 2003, work began on Twisted Metal: Harbor City... But on March 13, 2005, six key members of the Harbor City team were killed when their plane crashed following a celebratory skiing trip in Colorado...

On March 13th, 2007, two years to the day of the plane crash, a note arrived at the offices of Sony Computer Entertainment...

The note pleaded with Sony to allow the public to play the last works of the deceased team members. The note was signed with the names of the six deceased team members..."

So begin the lost levels from Twisted Metal: Black 2, found in the upcoming collector's cornucopia, Twisted Metal: Head On: Extra Twisted Edition for the Sony PlayStation 2. Maybe the story is true, and maybe it's Scooby-Doo, but either way, it's about time our PlayStation 2s played host to another haunting from Twisted Metal. Boo!

Okay, enough with the rhymes. Here are the details. For 20 bucks this February 5, you'll be able to purchase a port of Twisted Metal: Head On (originally for the PSP) that contains several "lost" levels from Twisted Metal: Black 2; a lengthy and awesome developer documentary featuring the entire history of the Twisted Metal series as told by David Jaffe, Scott Campbell, and other team members; a crazy minigame in which you run through a madhouse as Sweet Tooth while collecting bits of trivia and concept art; as well as all of the live-action endings of the original Twisted Metal (which have never been seen before), and finally, with a little unlocking, you'll be able to discover the identity of the next project from this illustrious team. Will it be Twisted Metal 3 for the PlayStation 3? Only time, and the Internet, will tell.

Oh yeah, did we mention this was all on one disc for 20 dollars? Aside

from all of the crazy extras that alone make this game worth buying, the best part of this Extra Twisted package is that, like a haunting ghost-written letter, it reminds you of how awesome Twisted Metal is. Seriously, when was the last time you thought about this series? Do you remember flipping 180-degree turns and firing off perfectly timed rockets into your rivals' windshields? Do you remember freezing enemy cars and then dumping gallon after gallon of napalm on them as if you were God and they were Gomorrah? What about the intricate level designs, with their giant, destructible set pieces and crazy jumps? Do you remember this? How could you have forgotten?

Let us jog your memory. Twisted Metal: Head On was a short but sweet dose of car carnage for the Sony PSP. Like Twisted Metal: Black before it, this game was one of the most anticipated and celebrated launch games for a Sony system. Not only did it feature the high-octane vehicular manslaughter that the series is famous for, but it was also the first Twisted Metal playable online. When you see Head On running on the PS2, you'll wonder what the heck Sony was thinking in porting this game up; it looks awful. But after just a few minutes of play, you won't simply understand; you'll wonder why they waited this long. Hopefully, the answer is that they're teasing our sweet teeth and priming us for a new Twisted Metal for the PS3.

In the meantime, Head On and the lost Black levels will provide hours of thrilling entertainment. Though the Black levels look much better, we actually favor Head On due to the higher concentrations of weapons in the various stages. Then again, the set pieces and explosions in the Black levels are much more spectacular.

In addition to all that gameplay, which we understand will eventually unlock some awesome secrets, you can also play the Sweet Tooth level. Evidently, there would've been levels in Twisted Metal: Black 2 where you could run around as Sweet Tooth himself, causing who knows what havoc. In Extra Twisted, you'll simply collect pieces of interesting trivia (did you know Twisted Metal 2 was originally planned as a hovercar game?) as well as concept art. This is definitely worth a quick look.

This is why people are afraid of clowns.

Then there's the video documentary that really outlines exactly how the series came together (the idea occurred to the developers when they were sitting in LA traffic). This is a surprisingly well-done video feature, and worth watching even if you aren't a diehard Twisted Metal fan. Finally, there are the cut endings. According to the video documentary, Jaffe was an aspiring filmmaker before he became a game developer, and these endings represented his opportunity to fuse the two passions into several sick cinematics. Unfortunately, they were deemed too crude and rude by the dev team in Utah (/pansies!/), so they were left on the cutting-room floor.

That's a shame, because they're awesomely bad. They're like short Troma films with less oozing puss, more bikinis, and porno-quality acting. They aren't remotely worth the 20 dollar price tag by themselves, but they're some of the best (and worst) bonus material we've ever seen.

So what are you waiting for? Oh, that's right, you're waiting for Twisted Metal: Head On: Extra Twisted Edition to crash into store shelves on February 5.

Virtual Games A Hit Among Retired US Seniors

Amid rousing applause and cheers, seniors in a retirement complex in the Washington suburbs have hopped onto the videogame craze, belatedly but with a vengeance, swinging their arms in a virtual game of bowling.

While video games are aimed more usually at younger audiences, Nintendo’s Wii, the mega-popular, new generation home console, has become all the rage in 3,000-resident Riderwood, one of the largest retirement communities in the United States, located in a Washington suburb.

Its popularity is largely due to a wireless handheld controller that requires players to replicate athletic movement, albeit minimal, but easily within the capabilities of more elderly players.

Erickson Retirement Communities, which runs the complex, has installed 25 Wii machines around Riderwood to encourage social interaction and exercising among the seniors.

"I love it," said Elaine Fowler, 82, a fiercely competitive player who gets around in a motorized wheelchair. "I’m here since day one. I feel really good when I get a strike and a spare."

Every week, some 20 retirees gather to play one of Wii’s sports games, in which players holding a wireless controller swing their arms to simulate a volleyball return, a virtual boxing punch, or a baseball bat swing.

At a recent battle for bowling supremacy, opposing teams gathered around two screens set up side by side as team members took turns "rolling" the bowling ball down a virtual lane to knock down as many pins as possible.

While bowling is the most popular virtual sport among Riderwood residents, golf and baseball are also strong, as are fishing and boxing competitions.

"We had a group of ladies who did a boxing session, and a 90-year-old lady got a knock out!" said Earl Davis, 73, a complex resident who comes out to cheer on competitors.

Even Nintendo seems amused.

"It’s the first time older people are embracing video games," Nintendo spokeswoman Eileen Tanner told AFP. "It’s pretty big."

She said players over the age of 30 make up about 27 percent of the buyers of what has become the world s best-selling "next-generation" games console - outselling rival Sony’s PlayStation 3 (PS3) three-fold in Japan and North America last year, according to a survey by magazine publisher Enterbrain and games analyst Hiroshi Kamide at KBC Security, both in Tokyo.

A recent study in the British Medical Journal found that although those hoping to get fit and lose weight should probably try more strenuous activities, the console s design did prompt the use of basic motor control and fundamental movement skills.

"It’s an exercise but minimal exercise, the type of exercise those people need, because they are not used to it," said Earl Davis, a retired navy officer who teaches Wii movements to novices at Riderwood.

Octogenarian Flo Lawrence, an avid fan, agreed. "It’s physical but without the effort, and you get satisfaction out of it," she said. It "gets you out of your apartment and you are with people."

Wheelchair-bound Marie Tsucalas, 93, is a newcomer to the games.

"I like to do something new," she said, as she aligned the keys on the motion sensitive hand controller. "I’m pretty busy with my cooking shows on the residence’s TV network and my cards game, poker included."

Among the 20 or so participants at the bowling match, the five on wheelchairs were the most enthusiastic and noisiest players.

The video game system "is good for a variety of things," said Davis. "It brings a social setting. People who don’t know each other are laughing, teasing each other. It brings back a competitive spirit too."

"It’s so easy everybody can do it."

Canadian Students Test Nintendo Wii Workout

Canadian students have given each other a Wii workout to see if the top-selling videogame console can get couch potatoes to work up a sweat.

Twenty-eight students at Dalhousie University in the East Coast city of Halifax, Nova Scotia, put the Nintendo Co console up against more traditional forms of exercise to see if playing games could actually be considered a workout.

"I was playing Wii boxing with a friend and noticed how exerting it was," said Justin White, a fourth-year kinesiology student.

"I thought to myself, ’I’m working up a sweat doing this Nintendo thing; I might run with that.’ So I put together an outline and the class thought it would be a good project to take on," he said.

White and 27 students in the Applications in Exercise Physiology class tested the impact of playing the Wii boxing game for 30 minutes against a 30-minute walk in a local park and an equal amount of time doing a boxercise video.

Every student did each activity and their heart rate was measured as well as how hard they thought they had worked out for all three activities.

They found that the Wii did get people off the couch and more active but, as a cardiovascular workout, it didn’t pass the test.

"If they’re looking for cardiovascular fitness, I’d advise them to do something else because it’s really not intense enough," White explained in an interview.

"But if they’re just looking to lose weight, it’s a good way to get started. It can also be a gateway to other things and may get people interested in the actual sports themselves too," he added.

The students said the most energetic exercise was the boxercise video,

while the walk through the park was the least demanding.

White, who is thinking about publishing his findings, believes interactive fitness could be a good way to get people to enjoy exercise more and therefore do it more.

"I've always held that the best exercise is exercise that a person will do," Jo Welch, the professor of the class, said in a statement.

"Because different activities appeal to different people, the more options that are readily available, the more likely it is that exercise will occur."

Nintendo plans to release Wii Fit, an exercise game later this year that allows the user to perform a variety of exercises - and tracks changes in their body-mass index. It has already sold more than a million copies in Japan.

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->A-ONE Gaming Online - Online Users Growl & Purr!
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Vintage Video Game and Computer Trade Show Announced

Remember how much fun you used to have playing Atari, Nintendo and all kinds of games on your computer? Well, you will have the rare opportunity to play these great games again at the Video Game Summit, a video game and computer trade show. In fact, several dealers in retro games will be on hand offering games, controllers, systems and memorabilia and will be prepared to buy or trade for the games you have held onto since you were a kid. Who knows, you might just have an Atari cartridge worth $1000 or more collecting dust in your attic.

"Retrogaming," the playing and collecting of vintage video and computer games, is more popular than ever. In fact, a dedicated group of programmers still issues new games for game systems, such as the Atari 2600, last seen in retail stores over fifteen years ago.

The Video Game Summit, now in its fifth year, brings together retrogamers from all over the country to swap stories, games and to compete in sanctioned tournaments. The event is open to the public and people of all ages with an interest in video games or computers are encouraged to attend. According to the event's organizer, Dan Iacovelli, "we plan to have several gaming consoles set to free play and a trade room where collectors will be free to swap their extra games." Best of all, admission is free!

The Video Game Summit will run from 9 a.m. until 6 p.m. and will be held in the Heron Point Building adjacent to the Fairfield Inn located at 645 West North Avenue in Lombard, Illinois. Registration is open now at http://avc.atari-users.net/Events/VGS_files/register.html.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Yahoo Plans To Cut Staff

Yahoo will announce plans to lay off hundreds of its 14,000 employees as the faltering Internet giant continues trying to snap out of its financial funk and fine tune its business strategies, several media outlets are reporting.

Yahoo will let go hundreds of staffers as part of its ongoing efforts to improve its profitability and compete against Google, Facebook, MySpace and others, according to articles in The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal that cited anonymous sources.

However, the Journal said that Yahoo will hire new employees in other areas and that it plans to finish the year with about the same amount of employees it had at the end of 2007.

If Yahoo does in fact keep its headcount at last year's level, then the layoffs will probably be seen as a rebalancing of staff and less as a sign of financial distress at the company.

A Yahoo spokeswoman contacted by IDG News Service declined to comment about layoff plans but said in an e-mailed statement that, as part of its multiyear transformation plan, the company plans to "invest in some areas, reduce emphasis in others, and eliminate some areas of the business," based on its priorities.

"Yahoo continues to attract and hire talent against the company's key initiatives to create long-term stockholder value," she said on Tuesday.

Yahoo is still deciding the extent of the layoffs and the areas that will be affected, and it will likely announce concrete plans to reduce staff next Tuesday when it issues its fourth-quarter earnings report, the Times and the Journal reported.

Whatever ends up happening with the reported staff cuts, it's undeniable that Yahoo is still very much in reorganization and recovery mode.

Once viewed as a dominant provider of online advertising and consumer Internet services, Yahoo has in recent years looked out of sync with the latest technical innovations and business opportunities. For starters, it let Google run away with the market for Internet search and advertising, and failed to develop a leading social-networking site, letting MySpace and Facebook capitalize on that opportunity. Yahoo also largely missed the online video revolution, which Google latched on to with its YouTube acquisition.

Along the way, its sales and profits have been disappointing for the past

two years, leading to several management shakeups in late 2006 and 2007.

By far, the most dramatic happened in June, when co-founder Jerry Yang took over as CEO and chairman from Terry Semel. At the time, Susan Decker, former chief financial officer and head of Yahoo’s advertiser and publisher group, became president.

A week after Semel’s demotion to non-executive chairman, Yahoo combined its search and display advertising sales teams in the U.S. It was an attempt to extend the company’s long-standing, core display advertising client relationships to the pay-per-click business, which generates about 40 percent of the industry’s online advertising and is dominated by Google.

In August, Yahoo again shook up its top management ranks when it announced that its top sales executive would leave and that a new global sales organization had been created.

In December 2006, Semel had rolled out a major reorganization, creating three main business units to focus on Yahoo’s key customer segments: consumers, advertisers and publishers. At the time, Semel also announced that Dan Rosensweig, then chief operating officer, would leave the company.

That reorganization was preceded by a widely publicized internal memo that was leaked to the media in November and came to be known as the Peanut Butter Manifesto. In the scathing memo, Brad Garlinghouse, Yahoo’s senior vice president of communications and communities, called for a major reorganization, saying the company lacked "a focused, cohesive vision" that had made it "reactive" and eager to be "everything to everyone."

Since the uproar over the Peanut Butter Manifesto and the ensuing shakeups, Yahoo has seen quite a few changes in its upper management ranks. In addition to Semel’s demotion and Rosensweig’s departure, also gone are Wenda Harris Millard, who was chief sales officer, and Chief Technology Officer Farzad Nazem. In June, The New York Times reported that, in addition to these executives, at least 17 others at vice president level or higher had left Yahoo since the December 2006 reorganization.

Big Delays for Small Laptops: OLPC Recipients Irate

When Seattle, Washington resident David Ruggiero heard about an opportunity to get his hands on the innovative XO laptop made by the One Laptop Per Child charitable organization, he hopped on it. Within two hours after the promotion began on Nov. 12 he snapped one up.

"It was for a good cause and also I really wanted a cool geeky toy for myself," Ruggiero says. Two and half months after placing his order, Ruggiero still has no XO, and he - and many others who took advantage of OLPC’s Give One, Get One program - are furious about having to deal with a litany of problems associated with the purchase.

The original aim of OLPC was to develop a $100 laptop for children in poor nations to ensure they don’t miss out on the benefits of computing, and to make sure developing countries don’t fall further and further behind

modern nations due to their inability to buy computers. This is a conundrum commonly referred to as the digital divide. A similar OLPC campaign for poor U.S. students was announced this month.

"I’m a big supporter of the OLPC and think it’s a fantastic mission, but there comes a point where you’ve got to say enough is enough," Ruggiero says.

The Give One, Get One program, launched last November, allowed let U.S. and Canadian residents to donate $400 to pay for two XO laptops. One laptop would go to a deserving child in a developing nation, and the other would go to the donor. The program was originally intended to last two weeks but was later extended for six. The offer ended on Dec. 31.

Complaints over delivery noshows, hour-long hold times on the phone trying to get in touch with the OLPC "Donor Services," and bungled customer service calls are common on OLPC message boards and at the independent OLPCNews.com site where XO customers linger online to commiserate over shipping woes.

Those who paid for their laptop using a PayPal account seem to be disproportionately affected. Many complain they’ve had to verify their address because - for reasons that are unclear - their address information was incomplete. To add insult to injury, those same people claim that, despite calling OLPC reps to update their shipping address, they’ve later discovered the OLPC still has the incomplete address on file, which they are told is the reason that their shipment is delayed.

OLPC spokesperson Jackie Lustig acknowledges problems with the ordering and the fulfillment process, but says the biggest challenges are a short supply of XO laptops and the organization’s ability to meet consumer demand for the XO laptop. She says interest in the program has been much larger than expected and more than OLPC can handle.

So far about 80,000 U.S. and Canadian OLPC donors took advantage of the Give One, Get One program, she says. Lustig declined to say exactly what percentage of customers have received their XO laptops.

"There have been delays in getting the laptops to those who generously donated to the program. And we are sorry," Lustig says. She says a special phone line is being set up for people who want to cancel their order and want a refund.

She says that the OLPC made a decision that getting laptops to developing nations was more important that delivering them to consumers. She adds that, while many laptops have already shipped to U.S. donors, the OLPC never offered anyone a firm delivery date. The terms and conditions when buying the XO state: "Delivery of your XO laptop may be subject to delays, and neither OLPC Foundation nor its suppliers can be responsible for any delays in delivery."

Despite these terms, many purchasers insist XO Donor Services representatives have made delivery promises that are not being met.

Some also wonder whether chronic delivery problems for Give One, Get One donors may bode poorly for the 15 countries slated to receive nearly 500,000 XO notebooks. "If OLPC can’t get notebooks to people in an industrialized nation, how can we expect it to deliver them to a country with a subpar infrastructure?" asks Mindy Engelberg, another disgruntled XO customer.

Lustig says delivering in bulk to just over a dozen countries is infinitely simpler than processing and delivering 80,000 individual laptops.

The OLPC’s apology may not be enough for Ruggiero and others. Ruggiero is so fed up he says he’s considering taking Lustig up on her offer and getting his money back.

Engelberg of Everett, Washington, says she spent $800 for two XO notebooks and hasn’t received either. "I keep hearing I’m going to get my laptops by this date, or next week, or it’s shipping," she says. "I wait and get nothing."

"The lack of clear communication has been what really annoys me," Engelberg adds.

Compounding the frustration is that OLPC doesn’t appear to have a functional order tracking system. According to XO customers, an order tracking page on the OLPC’s site at the URL LaptopGiving.org site allows you to punch in your order number to get shipping status. Those that use the site receive the message "you can check on the status of your laptop by visiting http://www.laptopgiving.org/," which is the exact same site.

Many of those that ordered the little laptops say they believe the culprit behind XO delays is a third-party California company called Patriot that OLPC hired to process orders and handle customer support. However, Doug Livingston, Patriot president and chief operating officer, begs to differ.

Livingston says his company just fields the calls, verifies the addresses, and forwards that information on to another company that boxes and preps the XOs for delivery. "All the information we receive is from the OLPC," he says.

Livingston says when an address is truncated or includes a post office box address (which its shipping agent Federal Express won’t deliver to) it’s something Patriot tries to correct. But, he stresses, his company never collected address information to begin with. OLPC’s Lustig acknowledges a problem in collecting complete address information for PayPal customers and some other customers who paid with a credit card.

"We absolutely have to verify an address is valid before we send the laptop out," Livingston says.

He is aware of long hold times that OLPC customers have had to endure, but says his company was not contracted by OLPC to handle the "extensive" call volumes it is currently receiving.

OLPC says the buck stops with it. "We take complete responsibility for the problems customers are having," Lustig says.

To that end, Lustig can’t says she can’t say for sure when the last XO notebook will be shipped to each Give One, Get One participant.

But at this time, she says, there are no plans to Give One, Get One program to Europe, as some reports have rumored.

Google Combats Domain Name Loophole

The online advertising leader Google Inc. said Friday it would help make it less lucrative to tie up millions of Internet addresses using a loophole and keep those domain names from legitimate individuals and businesses.

Over the next few weeks, Google will start looking for names that are repeatedly registered and dropped within a five-day grace period for full refunds.

Google’s AdSense program would exclude those names so no one can generate advertising revenue from claiming them temporarily, a practice known as domain name tasting - the online equivalent of buying expensive clothes on a charge card only to return them for a full refund after wearing them to a party.

"We believe that this policy will have a positive impact for users and domain purchasers across the Web," Google spokesman Brandon McCormick said.

The company said it notified participants via e-mail Thursday.

Name tasting exploits a grace period originally designed to rectify legitimate mistakes, such as registrants mistyping the domain name they are about to buy. But with automation and a burgeoning online advertising market, entrepreneurs have generated big bucks exploiting the policy to test hoards of names, keeping just the ones that turn out to generate the most revenue.

The practice ties up millions of domain names at any given time, making it more difficult for legitimate individuals and businesses to get a desirable name.

Jay Westerdal, who earlier wrote about Google’s change on his DomainTools blog, said in an interview that the ban should make domain name tasting far less lucrative. He noted that Google’s chief rival, Yahoo Inc., already tries to ban tasted addresses that infringe on trademarks and account for much of the problem.

"If Google and Yahoo are not monetizing these types of sites, I think domain tasting as we know it will come to a screeching halt," Westerdal said. "The alternative advertising is just not as effective."

In October, Yahoo sued several domain name registration companies over tasting, accusing them of targeting trademarks owned by Yahoo and other leading brands. The lawsuit is pending in U.S. District Court in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. Dell Inc. and BMW have filed similar federal lawsuits in Florida.

The Internet’s key oversight agency, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, already is looking into name tasting and will soon ask a committee to review the issue and craft recommendations. A public comment period on draft procedures closes Monday.

The operators of the ".org" suffix already won approval to charge companies that make too many returns. The number of deletions dropped to 152,700 in June, compared with 2.4 million in May, after the new fee took effect.

AT&T Looking at Internet Filtering

AT&T Inc. is still evaluating whether to examine traffic on its Internet lines to stop illegal sharing of copyright material, its chief executive said Wednesday.

CEO Randall Stephenson told a conference at the World Economic Forum that the company is looking at monitoring peer-to-peer file-sharing networks, one of the largest drivers of online traffic but also a common way to illegally exchange copyright files.

"It’s like being in a store and watching someone steal a DVD. Do you act?" Stephenson asked.

AT&T has talked about such plans since last summer. They represent a break with the current practice of U.S. Internet service providers, who are shielded by law from liability if their subscribers trade copyright files like movies.

Stephenson said he still sees value in peer-to-peer networks despite some problems. The networks are increasingly used for legally distributed files like movie trailers and software.

Comcast Corp., the second largest U.S. Internet provider after AT&T, has chosen another way to deal with the congestion caused by file-sharers, by hampering some peer-to-peer traffic regardless of whether the content is legal.

The U.S. Federal Communications Commission said earlier this month it would investigate complaints from consumer groups and legal scholars that Comcast’s practice violates the open access principles of the Internet.

Scam Wars: Phishing Kits Exploit Customers

In a twist, security researchers have discovered a group of hackers who are exploiting a new category of victims - aspiring Internet scammers.

A Moroccan group called "Mr. Brain" is offering free phishing kits on a Web site hosted in France, said Paul Mutton, Internet services developer at Netcraft, a security company in Bath, England.

The software packages make it easy to quickly set up a fraudulent Web site mimicking a known brand in order to trick people into divulging credit card details or bank account numbers. Templates for spam e-mail are also included, targeting brands such as Bank of America, eBay, PayPal and HSBC.

Mr. Brain’s Web site lists the kits and what kind of details each one is capable of collecting, such as usernames, passwords or Social Security numbers. Netcraft posted screenshots on its Web site.

But what the aspiring scammer doesn’t know is that the phishing kits are designed to send any sensitive information that’s collected back to e-mail accounts controlled by Mr. Brain, Mutton said.

"Obviously, that’s why they are offering this stuff for free," Mutton said. "I was impressed by it."

Mr. Brain hides the special e-mail function in a blend of PHP scripts, one of which is encrypted, Mutton said. Just in case someone decrypts it, Mr. Brain has written at the top of the file "Don’t need to change anything here. Created by Mr. Brain Morocco Team."

The scheme seems to be targeted at new phishers, Mutton said. Mr. Brain benefits since other wannabe scammers shoulder the cost and risk of finding an ISP (Internet Service Provider) to host the phishing site, Mutton said.

"Essentially, they’re exploiting all these novice phishers - basically getting them to do all the hard work," Mutton said.

It’s difficult to tell without further research how many of the free phishing kits linked with this latest scam are live on the Internet, but Mutton said Netcraft noticed one earlier this month targeting Bank of America.

"Clearly, these are actively being used in phishing attacks," Mutton said.

EBay CEO Meg Whitman To Retire

EBay CEO Meg Whitman is planning to step down from the company she has led for the past 10 years, The Wall Street Journal said Tuesday.

Whitman has been delegating more tasks to deputies over the last few months and is expected to decide on her retirement in the coming weeks, the newspaper said quoting "people familiar with the matter." John Donahue, who leads the company’s auction business, is the leading candidate to succeed her, according to the newspaper.

EBay, which also operates the PayPal payment system and Skype Internet telephony service, is due to report earnings for the fourth quarter Wednesday. The quarter includes the traditionally-strong year-end holiday period and estimates see eBay reporting earnings per share of US$0.38.

The company reported a net profit of US$1.1 billion in 2006 on the back of US$6 billion in revenue. For 2007 eBay expects revenue to jump to US$7.6 billion.

EU Official: IP Is Personal

IP addresses, string of numbers that identify computers on the Internet, should generally be regarded as personal information, the head of the European Union’s group of data privacy regulators said Monday.

Germany’s data protection commissioner, Peter Scharr, leads the EU group preparing a report on how well the privacy policies of Internet search engines operated by Google Inc., Yahoo Inc., Microsoft Corp. and others

comply with EU privacy law.

He told a European Parliament hearing on online data protection that when someone is identified by an IP, or Internet protocol, address "then it has to be regarded as personal data."

His view differs from that of Google, which insists an IP address merely identifies the location of a computer, not who the individual user is - something strictly true but which does not recognize that many people regularly use the same computer terminal and IP address.

Scharr acknowledged that IP addresses for a computer may not always be personal or linked to an individual. For example, some computers in Internet cafes or offices are used by several people.

But these exceptions have not stopped the emergence of a host of "whois" Internet sites that apply the general rule that typing in an IP address will generate a name for the person or company linked to it.

Treating IP addresses as personal information would have implications for how search engines record data.

Google led the pack by being the first last year to cut the time it stored search information to 18 months. It also reduced the time limit on the cookies that collect information on how people use the Internet from a default of 30 years to an automatic expiration in two years.

But a privacy advocate at the nonprofit Electronic Privacy Information Center, or EPIC, said it was "absurd" for Google to claim that stripping out the last two figures from the stored IP address made the address impossible to identify by making it one of 256 possible configurations.

"It’s one of the things that make computer people giggle," EPIC executive director Marc Rotenberg told The Associated Press. "The more the companies know about you, the more commercial value is obtained."

Google’s global privacy counsel, Peter Fleischer, however, said Google collects IP addresses to give customers a more accurate service because it knows what part of the world a search result comes from and what language they use - and that was not enough to identify an individual user.

"If someone taps in ’football’ you get different results in London than in New York," he said.

He said the way Google stores IP addresses meant one of them forms part of a crowd, giving valuable information on general trends without infringing on an individual’s privacy.

Google says it needs to store search queries and gather information on online activity to improve its search results and to provide advertisers with correct billing information that shows that genuine users are clicking on online ads.

Internet ’click fraud’ can be tracked down by showing that the same IP address is jumping repeatedly to the same ad. Advertisers pay for each time a different person views the ad, so dozens of views by the same person can rack up costs without giving the company the publicity it wanted.

Microsoft does not record the IP address that identifies an individual computer when it logs search terms. Its Internet strategy relies on users logging into the Passport network that is linked to its popular Hotmail and Messenger services.

The company's European Internet policy director, Thomas Myrup Kristensen, described the move as part of Microsoft's commitment to privacy.

"In terms of the impact on user privacy, complete and irreversible anonymity is the most important point here - more impactful than whether the data is retained for 13 versus 18 versus 24 months," he said.

But neither of the search engines received a pat on the back from Spain's data protection regulator, Artemi Rallo Lombarte, who criticized them for not trying to make their privacy policies accessible to normal people.

Their privacy policies "could very well be considered virtual or fictional ... because search engines do not sufficiently emphasize their own privacy policies on their home pages, nor are they accessible to users," he said, describing the policies as "complex and unintelligible to users."

Database Assembles U.S. Warnings of Saddam Threat

The Bush administration's warnings about prewar Iraq, from Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's "mushroom cloud" to Vice President Dick Cheney's statements on weapons of mass destruction, were released on Wednesday in a searchable online database.

The Center for Public Integrity, a Washington research group highly critical of U.S. policy in Iraq, put together 935 comments uttered by eight top administration officials including President George W. Bush in the run-up to the March 2003 U.S.-led invasion.

Much of their case for war has since been discredited, in large part because no Iraqi weapons of mass destruction were found despite the administration's prewar warnings that Iraq's arsenal presented a threat to its neighbors and U.S. interests.

Bush critics including Democrats in Congress charge the administration hyped its case for war. Republicans maintain that the prewar assertions were simply based on faulty intelligence.

The remarks compiled by the center, totaling about 380,000 words, are largely well-known and range from assertions that Saddam Hussein was seeking uranium to build a nuclear weapon, to warnings of a link between Iraq and the al Qaeda militant network blamed for the September 11 attacks.

The Center for Public Integrity, which released the database on its Web site at http://www.publicintegrity.org/WarCard/, said the comments show how Bush and senior administration officials "methodically propagated erroneous information over the two years beginning on September 11, 2001."

One ominous comment came in September 2002, when Rice said in a CNN interview that the United States should not wait for proof of Iraq’s nuclear capabilities. "We don’t want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud," warned Rice, then Bush’s national security adviser.

An analysis of the data showed that Bush made the largest number of comments, at 260, followed by former Secretary of State Colin Powell with 254, the center said.

The administration comments were assembled from a number of sources including news articles and government reports and speeches.

Cable Company Empties 14,000 E-mail Accounts

Charter Communications officials believe a software error during routine maintenance caused the company to delete the contents of 14,000 customer e-mail accounts.

There is no way to retrieve the messages, photos and other attachments that were erased from inboxes and archive folders across the country on Monday, said Anita Lamont, a spokeswoman for the suburban St. Louis-based company.

"We really are sincerely sorry for having had this happen and do apologize to all those folks who were affected by the error," Lamont said Thursday when the company announced the gaff.

Charter, one of the nation’s largest cable TV operators, also provides telephone and high-speed Internet service. It has applied a $50 credit to the bill of each customer whose account was affected by the mistake, Lamont said.

Charter gives each new Internet user a free e-mail account, but some customers opt to use other accounts instead. So every three months the company deletes inactive accounts, Lamont said.

"During this maintenance we erroneously deleted active accounts along with the others," Lamont said. "It’s never happened before. They are taking steps to make sure it never happens again."

Charter provides service in 29 states, and Lamont said the affected customers were scattered around the country. All told, the company has about 2.6 million high-speed Internet subscribers.

Computer experts advise backing up all important e-mail.

Major Japanese Prize for 3 Americans

Three Americans have won 2008 Japan Prizes, which each carry a $470,000 award, as well as enormous prestige in Japan, including a ceremony attended by the emperor and empress and national dignitaries.

Americans Vinton Cerf and Robert Kahn, who designed a language for data

transmission that gave rise to the Internet, will share the Japan Prize in Information Communication Theory and Technology.

Victor A. McKusick, a genetics professor at Johns Hopkins University School of medicine won the prize for medical genetics and genomics.

Cerf, Kahn and McKusick are to receive medals and the award money at a formal presentation April 23 in Tokyo.

McKusick is a key architect of the Human Genome Project and winner of the 2001 National Medal of Science, the United States' highest scientific prize. He also is the twin brother of former Maine Chief Justice Vincent McKusick and a namesake of the McKusick-Nathans Institute of Genetic Medicine at Johns Hopkins.

Cerf and Kahn, who designed a language for data transmission that gave rise to the Internet, also received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2005, which is this nation's highest civil award.

The Japan Prize is funded principally by the Matsushita Electric Industrial Co. Ltd.

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